

Corbett

EARLY MISSIONS IN WESTERN CANADA.

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The story of the early missions in Western Canada has been considered under four divisions:

- 1st. Roman Catholic Missions
- 2nd. Anglican Missions.
- 3rd. Methodist Missions.
- 4th. Presbyterian Missions.

1st. ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONS.

It is not known positively whether any Priest accompanied Radisson on any of his explorations. A Priest did accompany the Verendrye expedition, and one was massacred with Verendrye's son in an encounter with Sault Indians on the Lake of the Woods. An Irish Priest, Father Burke, accompanied Red River settlers as far as Hudson Bay in 1811 and wintered there, returning to Ireland the following year. It is reported that he solemnized the first marriage in Western Canada by uniting two staunch Scotch Presbyterians. Permanent Roman Catholic missions were opened at Red River in 1818 by Fathers Provencher and Dumoulin; Father Provencher later becoming the first bishop. The famous St. Boniface cathedral was built quite early in the history of missions. It was beautifully commemorated in Whittier's poem - "The Red River Voyageur":

The Bells of the Roman mission,
That call from their terrets twain
To the Boatman on the River,
To the hunter on the plain.

It was burned down December 14th, 1860, by the accidental up-setting of a dish of tallow in the kitchen where a nun was making candles.

One of the outstanding names of the early Roman Catholic missions is that of Father Belcourt who was established on the Assiniboine River

thirty miles from its mouth in 1833. Father Belcourt possessed an unusual knowledge of Indian languages and taught agriculture, carpentry, etc. Because of his emphasis upon arts in civilization, he was not always appreciated by his colleagues.

The first Roman Catholic mission at Edmonton was established in 1842 by Father Thibault on the invitation of John Rowand, famous in the annals of the district as "The Builder of Rowand's Folly", the name of the huge house inside of the stockade at Fort Edmonton which was used as a sort of Vice-regal headquarters for the Hudson Bay district of Athabasca. Fathers Blanchet and Demers on their way to Oregon erected a cross at Edmonton. John Rowand was a Roman Catholic, and something of a character, though^{in 1838.} he does not appear to have worked very hard at his religion. The story is told of him that at a dinner party when a song deriding the Pope was started, he rose to his feet and said "I am a Catholic and I shall never allow the head of my Religion to be insulted" and threw his glass at the head of the singer. A guest remarked "If Mr. Rowand did not often kneel in church he knew how to stand for his church". He has been described as a typical trader, a miniature emperor who possessed the impetuosity of the Irish to a marked degree. He used simple chemical reactions such as Seidlitz powders to overpower the natives. Father Thibault appears not to have gotten on too well with Rowand, and in 1842-3 we find him starting a mission at Lac St Anne, where a mission has been carried on ever since. The early records show that grain growing at Lac St Anne was consistently unsuccessful during all the early years on account of frosts. The site was chosen because it was off the path of the marauding war parties of the Cree and Blackfoot.

The first nuns in Western Canada were four grey nuns or Sisters of Charity, who arrived at St. Boniface June 21st, 1844.

St. Albert mission was built by Father Lacombe in 1861, and very

soon became chief centre for the far West. From it, work was pushed into the far North country, important missions being established at Lac La Biche, Isle La Cross, Chippewyan, and Good Hope among other places. A man largely responsible for this work was Father Grandin, later Bishop Grandin. One of the interesting missions in the Edmonton territory is that of Duhamel where Father Bellevaire, who is still living and at that mission, was installed by Bishop Grandin on April 27-28, 1881.

Probably the most outstanding figure in the Roman Catholic church of Western Canada was Archbishop Taché, who for many years was in charge at St. Boniface. He is thought by some to have been the greatest missionary statesman that Western Canada has seen.

The most romantic figure in the history of Roman Catholic missions in Alberta is that of Father Lacombe, whose story is sympathically told in Catherine Hughes' book "Father Lacombe; the Black-robed voyageur, who was the first Roman Catholic missionary to make any headway among the Blackfoot, and although he founded St. Paul of the Cree's mission, now Bruiso, an off-shoot of which is the present St. Paul de Metis, yet his heart always seems to have been with the Blackfoot.

References: History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada. by Father Morice.
Father Lacombe -the Blackrobed Voyageur, by Catherine Hughes.

2nd. ANGLICAN MISSIONS.

The first Anglican missionary in Western Canada was Rev. John West, who began work at Red River in 1820. Before many years the Presbyterians of the Red River colony had no minister of their own faith, and were looked after by the Anglican missionary who arranged a special service which was a sort of compromise between the Anglican ritual and the Presbyterian practice. The Bishopric of Rupert's land was

was established in 1849, and the Anglican church pushed vigorously into the Northwest country. A church was built at Fort Simpson in 1859 by Rev. Kirkby, and a mission was established at Fort Vermilion in 1880 with Mr. Lawrence in charge.

Perhaps the most romantic figure of the Anglican missions is that of Bishop Bompas, whose story is told in "The Apostle of the North". For over 40 years Bishop Bompas roamed over the North country between Chipewyan and Lake Athabasca and the Yukon territory. He was a unique combination of frontier-man missionary and scholar, leaving behind him a vast amount of unpublished manuscript dealing with interpretations of scripture based upon original Syriac texts. Just on the eve of coming out to civilization he died at Carcross in 1906, leaving behind a splendid memory and tradition of unselfish work. He arrived at Fort Simpson Xmas day 1865, and was 41 years in the north country.

3rd. METHODIST MISSIONS

The first Methodist missionaries in Western Canada were sent out by Wesley, M.J. of England, and were four in number: Rev. Jas. Evans, inventor of the Cree syllabics, Norway House; George Barnley, Moose Factory; William Mason, Lac La Pluie; Rev. R.T. Rundle, Edmonton and Rocky Mountain House.

Evans appears to have been a very remarkable man. His travels carried him over the rivers and plains of the far West way into the north country. He had built a sheet iron canoe which was known, because of its flashing appearance in the sun, as "The Island of Light". He invented a system of writing known as the Cree Syllabics, by reason of which an intelligent Indian could learn to read in two weeks' time, and a system which has been adopted or adapted by all when they

wished to translate literature into the Indian tongues. He was the first printer in Western Canada, whittling his types from blocks of wood from which he moulded slugs made of tea lead. Printing was looked upon with suspicion by the Hudson Bay authorities, but Evans was able to overcome their scruples and succeeded in having a printing press with type, manufactured in London and sent out for the exclusive purpose of printing scripture extracts.

Mr. Rundle, Edmonton missionary, appears to have been the first missionary to venture among the Blackfoot and Stony Indians. It is recorded of him that he pushed south and west as far as the present town of Banff in the summer of 1841, camping for weeks at the foot of Mount Rundle which he climbed and which bears his name. He seems to have left a permanent impression on the Indians for many years after. Mr. Steinhauer, on coming unexpectedly upon a camp of Indians overheard them praying, the burden of the petition being "Dord send us another missionary like Rundle". He made his headquarters at Edmonton, but a large part of his time was occupied in following the Indians from place to place in their hunting camps. He returned to England 1848, and was succeeded by Thos. Woolsey, whose period in the West was from 1854 - 1863. Mr. Woolsey founded a mission at what is now Smoky Lake, which was worked by his successor, Geo. McDougall of Victoria, at present Paken. With the McDougall's, George and his son, we come to our own time, for it is only a few years since John McDougall died in 1917 at Calgary. George McDougall was a sailor and Indian missionary in Ontario, making his living chiefly by operating a small ^b schooner on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, the while he ministered to the Indians settled around what is now the town of Owen Sound. He had all the resourcefulness of the Ontario back-

woodsman, and when transplanted to the Western prairies very quickly adapted himself. John McDougall grew up among the Indians and excelled in all their sports and occupations, being a famous runner, an all-round athlete, as well as a very expert dog driver, Buffalo hunter and fisherman. He was famed for the fine horses he kept, as well as for the most intimate knowledge of the Indian language of any white man in Western Canada. "John" as he was known by the Indians far and near, was perhaps the most influential figure in the closing quarter of the 19th Century among the Indians of the West. Repeatedly he was sent out by the Hudson Bay Company or the Government or both on missions of a diplomatic character to the Indians, and he seems to have been wonderfully successful. The hardships endured by the early missionaries is illustrated by a note in Bishop Bompas's diary where he says "Instead of speaking of minutes and weeks, we speak in years. For instance I say "I must order a book; I shall probably get it next year; if not then, the year after," as the mail sometimes reached them less frequently even than once a year.

References: Story of the Mail Driver who got ^{the} Letters Mixed.

4th. PRESBYTERIAN MISSIONS

The first Presbyterian missionary, Rev. J. Black, came to Red River colony and established Kildonan parish, Sept. 19th, 1851, He was reinforced by Jas. Nesbitt in 1862, who founded Price Albert settlement and worked among the Crees. In 1871, Manitoba college was founded. Jan. 9th, 1874, Jas. Robertson, came as pastor to Knox church, Winnipeg. He was afterwards promoted to be Missionary Superintendent for Presbyterian missions throughout Western Canada. In general Presbyterian missions, even in Western Canada, were largely confined to following up new settlers, and with a few notable

exceptions not much was undertaken in Indian work as that field had been fairly well occupied before the arrival of the Presbyterians by the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches.

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Corbett, E.O.?

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